

RETAIL PRICES - MARCH QUARTER, 1955.

The "C" Series Index Numbers.

Index numbers of retail prices ("C" Series) for the March quarter of 1955 (with the weighted average of the six capital cities in 1923-1927 as base of 1,000) were as shown below.

"C" Series Retail Price Index Numbers and Percentage Increases, March Quarter, 1955.

City.		Index Number.	Increase from Year Ended June, 1939.	Increase from March Quarter, 1954.	Increase from December Quarter, 1954.
			%	%	%
Brisbane ..	..	2,195	154.3	0.4	0.8
Toowoomba ..	..	2,227	161.7	1.0	1.6
Rockhampton ..	..	2,238	159.9	0.8	1.8
Townsville ..	..	2,326	155.0	1.0	2.2
Bundaberg ..	..	2,188	160.2	1.4	1.2
Warwick ..	..	2,207	168.5	1.2	1.1

The "C" Series index number for Brisbane for the first quarter of 1955, 2,195, was the highest ever recorded for the metropolitan area, having risen by 0.8 per cent. from the December 1954 quarter's figure of 2,178. It was, however, only 0.4 per cent. above the index number for the corresponding quarter of 1954, the three intervening quarters having shown lower figures. Moreover, the latest increase of 0.8 per cent. was less than the 1.3 per cent. rise which occurred between the September and December quarters of 1954. Other cities for which the index numbers are available also showed rises in the March quarter of 1955, all of them being greater than Brisbane's 0.8 per cent. and ranging up to 2.2 per cent. for Townsville.

In all cities the increases were chiefly due to food price variations which included, as well as increases, some decreases in important items as, for example, in meat in Brisbane. A number of food items which are subject to seasonal price fluctuations showed disparate price changes in the different cities and were the principal factor in causing the differing rises in the total index numbers. Among these items were potatoes, meat, eggs, and bacon. Clothing prices were fairly stable, three cities showing slight increases and three slight decreases. Townsville, where the miscellaneous section of the index recorded a small rise, was the only one of the six index number cities to show any significant change in that section.

The index number for Brisbane for the latest quarter was 154.3 per cent. above its pre-war (1938-39) level. This increase was very similar to that which has occurred during and since the war in the other capital cities, the weighted average index number for the six capital cities in March quarter of 1955 being 157.6 per cent. above its 1938-39 level. Brisbane still had the lowest prices of any capital city, the next lowest prices being in Melbourne where the recent quarter's index number was 4.9 per cent. above that for Brisbane, while the highest were in Perth, where they were 14.5 per cent. above Brisbane prices. Before the war, Perth prices were closest to Brisbane (3.5 per cent. in excess) and Sydney prices were most (7.5 per cent.) in excess.

Percentage changes during the last quarter and since 1938-39 in food and groceries, clothing and footwear, and miscellaneous items are shown in the following table.

Retail Prices, Percentage Increases^a, March Quarter, 1955.

City.	Food and Groceries.		Clothing and Footwear.		Miscellaneous Items.	
	From Year Ended June, 1939.	From Dec. Quarter, 1954.	From Year Ended June, 1939.	From Dec. Quarter, 1954.	From Year Ended June, 1939.	From Dec. Quarter, 1954.
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Brisbane ..	192.3	1.9	277.9	-0.1	109.8	-
Toowoomba	216.0	3.7	272.3	-0.4	107.0	0.1
Rockhampton	189.4	3.7	270.1	0.4	118.3	0.1
Townsville	184.0	4.0	275.7	0.3	120.3	0.7
Bundaberg	188.6	3.0	269.2	-0.1	104.2	0.1
Warwick ..	207.2	2.5	280.2	0.1	113.4	-

^a Minus (-) indicates decrease.

Food and Groceries.

As shown in the preceding table, increases were recorded during the quarter in the food and grocery index numbers for the six cities for which data are collected. Considerable increases were recorded in potato prices in the six cities, and tea and egg prices also rose. Meat prices increased in the five provincial cities but decreased in Brisbane. A general decrease was recorded in bacon prices, and there were small increases and decreases in the prices of various other items.

Clothing and Miscellaneous.

Small changes in the prices of several items included in the clothing and footwear index numbers resulted in only slight movements being recorded in those indexes during the quarter. The variations ranged from a decrease of 0.4 per cent. in Toowoomba to an increase of 0.4 per cent. in Rockhampton. Except in Townsville, the miscellaneous items index numbers remained practically unchanged. The increase of 0.7 per cent. in Townsville was due mainly to higher prices for firewood.

Rent (4 and 5 Roomed Houses).

The rent index remained stationary in Bundaberg and Warwick, but in the other four cities increased by amounts ranging from 0.3 per cent. in Brisbane to 3.5 per cent. in Townsville.

Comparison of Costs in Queensland Cities.

The following table shows the amounts, for the various Queensland cities, required in March quarter, 1955, to purchase the quantity of goods or housing which would have cost £1 in Brisbane.

Amounts Required in Various Cities to Purchase Equivalent of £1 in Brisbane.

City.	All Groups.			Food and Groceries.			Rent (4 and 5 Rooms).			Clothing and Footwear.			Miscellaneous Items.		
	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.
Brisbane ..	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Toowoomba ..	1	0	3 $\frac{1}{2}$	1	0	3 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	0	9 $\frac{3}{4}$		19	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	1	0	4 $\frac{3}{4}$
Rockhampton	1	0	4 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	0	8 $\frac{1}{2}$		19	2 $\frac{1}{2}$		19	11 $\frac{1}{2}$	1	1	2
Townsville	1	1	2 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	1	8 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	1	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	0	1 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	2	0 $\frac{1}{4}$
Bundaberg ..		19	11 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	0	10		16	5 $\frac{1}{4}$		19	9 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	0	3 $\frac{1}{2}$
Warwick ..	1	0	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	0	9 $\frac{1}{4}$		15	8 $\frac{3}{4}$	1	0	0 $\frac{1}{4}$	1	1	5 $\frac{1}{4}$

In relation to Brisbane, the prices of all groups together increased during the recent quarter in the five provincial cities for which the index numbers are calculated. The largest increase in these relative prices (3 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the £) was recorded in Townsville and the smallest in Warwick ($\frac{3}{4}$ d. in the £). Townsville remained the dearest city of those included in the survey, while Bundaberg was still the cheapest and the only one where retail prices generally were cheaper than in Brisbane. The amount required to purchase goods costing £1 in Brisbane was only 19s. 11 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in Bundaberg, compared with £1 1s. 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in Townsville.

The prices of food and groceries in each of the five provincial cities remained higher than in Brisbane, and during March quarter their excess over Brisbane prices increased by amounts ranging from 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the £ in Warwick to 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. in the £ in Townsville.

During the March quarter prices of clothing and footwear in Bundaberg retained the same relativity to Brisbane prices as in the previous quarter, while only small variations were recorded for the other cities. In the five provincial cities these prices are closer to Brisbane prices than those of other items, and during March quarter were cheaper than in Brisbane except in Townsville and Warwick where an additional 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. and $\frac{1}{4}$ d. respectively would have been needed to purchase clothing and footwear costing £1 in Brisbane.

Miscellaneous items are more expensive in all five provincial cities than in Brisbane. During March quarter the additional costs in four of these cities increased by only $\frac{1}{4}$ d. in the £. In the other city (Townsville) the increase recorded was 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ d. in the £.

Commonwealth and State Basic Wage Rates.

The Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration has suspended automatic ("cost of living") adjustments since the adjustment which operated from the beginning of the first pay-period in August, 1953.

State Industrial Courts in New South Wales, South Australia, and Western Australia have not made any basic wage adjustments since their declarations following the publication of index numbers for the June quarter of 1953. In Victoria, where wages are determined by Wages Boards, special legislation required the continuation of the automatic adjustment of wage rates in accordance with variations in retail price index numbers. Subsequent variations in the Melbourne index numbers caused a net increase of 2s. in the basic rate for males up to the March quarter of 1955. In Tasmania, where rates are also controlled by Wages Boards, an adjustment of 10s. which operated after the publication of the September quarter index numbers early in November, 1953, was cancelled from 9th December, 1953, and the rates remain at their August 1953 level.

In Queensland, the State Industrial Court, after the publication of the index numbers for the September quarter of 1953, increased the basic wage by 3s. for males and 2s. for females, and, following the publication of the December quarter 1953 index numbers, a further increase of 3s. for males and 2s. for females was made. The Court considered that the changes in the index numbers in each of the four quarters of 1954 did not indicate a significant economic trend and no basic wage adjustment was made during that period. The index numbers for the March quarter of 1955 are still under consideration by the Court.

Retail Prices and Basic Wage Rates.Australian Capital Cities.

Capital City.	Retail Price Index ("C" Series).			Commonwealth Basic Wage.		State Basic Wage.			
	June Quarter, 1953.	December Quarter, 1954.	March Quarter, 1955.	Males. ^a		Males.	Females.	Date of Operation. ^b	
				£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.
Brisbane	2,115	2,178	2,195	10	18 0	11	5 0	7	11 0
Sydney	2,360	2,391	2,405	12	3 0	12	3 0	9	2 0
Melbourne	2,279	2,281	2,302	11	15 0	11	17 0	8	18 0
Adelaide	2,238	2,294	2,310	11	11 0	11	11 0	8	13 0
Perth	2,290	2,502	2,514	11	16 0	12	6 6	8	0 3
Hobart	2,351	2,391	2,415	12	2 0	12	2 0	9	1 6

a The female rates are 75 per cent. of the male rates.

b Where dates are not quoted wage rates operate from beginning of first pay-period in month shown.

c No State wage actually declared. The rate fixed by the Commonwealth Court was usually followed to a large extent until August, 1953. For subsequent adjustment see above.

S. E. SOLOMON,
GOVERNMENT STATISTICIAN.

BRISBANE.

12th May, 1955.

Table 1 - The "C" Series Retail Prices Index.

(Base: Weighted Average of Six Capital Cities, 1923-1927 = 1,000.)

City.	Year Ended June, 1939.	Year Ended June, 1946.	Year Ended March, 1955.	Quarter Ended -				
				March, 1954.	June, 1954.	Sept., 1954.	Dec., 1954.	March, 1955.
Brisbane	863	1,079	2,172	2,187	2,163	2,150	2,178	2,195
Toowoomba ..	851	1,092	2,197	2,204	2,197	2,173	2,191	2,227
Rockhampton ..	861	1,084	2,211	2,221	2,215	2,191	2,198	2,238
Townsville ..	912	1,119	2,290	2,304	2,288	2,270	2,275	2,326
Bundaberg ..	841	1,059	2,164	2,158	2,163	2,144	2,161	2,188
Weighted Average								
Five Towns ..	864	1,082	2,184	2,197	2,177	2,162	2,186	2,209
Warwick	822	1,073	2,185	2,180	2,180	2,168	2,183	2,207

Table 2 - Food and Groceries Retail Prices Index.

(Base: Weighted Average of Six Capital Cities, 1923-1927 = 1,000.)

City.	Year Ended June, 1939.	Year Ended June, 1946.	Year Ended March, 1955.	Quarter Ended -				
				March, 1954.	June, 1954.	Sept., 1954.	Dec., 1954.	March, 1955.
Brisbane	856	971	2,451	2,504	2,440	2,404	2,456	2,502
Toowoomba ..	814	1,010	2,501	2,516	2,498	2,453	2,480	2,572
Rockhampton ..	895	1,012	2,541	2,591	2,573	2,504	2,498	2,590
Townsville ..	955	1,057	2,649	2,703	2,666	2,610	2,607	2,712
Bundaberg ..	903	1,027	2,544	2,557	2,544	2,495	2,530	2,606
Weighted Average								
Five Towns ..	864	984	2,477	2,526	2,472	2,431	2,473	2,530
Warwick	846	1,000	2,546	2,549	2,541	2,509	2,536	2,599

Table 3 - Clothing and Footwear Retail Prices Index.

(Base: Weighted Average of Six Capital Cities, 1923-1927 = 1,000.)

City.	Year Ended June, 1939.	Year Ended June, 1946.	Year Ended March, 1955.	Quarter Ended -				
				March, 1954.	June, 1954.	Sept., 1954.	Dec., 1954.	March, 1955.
Brisbane	829	1,454	3,124	3,117	3,117	3,109	3,135	3,133
Toowoomba ..	829	1,429	3,094	3,127	3,108	3,083	3,097	3,086
Rockhampton ..	845	1,477	3,106	3,092	3,089	3,093	3,116	3,127
Townsville ..	840	1,457	3,140	3,134	3,129	3,130	3,146	3,156
Bundaberg ..	839	1,447	3,090	3,094	3,081	3,081	3,100	3,098
Weighted Average								
Five Towns ..	831	1,454	3,121	3,116	3,114	3,107	3,131	3,130
Warwick	825	1,441	3,122	3,095	3,112	3,107	3,133	3,137